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For Immediate Release

Cumberland County to be a pilot site for new Truancy Diversion Program created by the Kentucky Court of Justice

FRANKFORT, Ky., March 20, 2006 — Cumberland County Middle School in Burkesville has been designated as a pilot site for the new Truancy Diversion Pilot Program, which will eventually be available statewide. The Kentucky Court of Justice has announced the creation of the Truancy Diversion Program for students at risk of being charged with a truancy offense and referred to District Court or Family Court.

"We have gotten off to a good start with this important program for Kentucky's youth," said Sherry Riddle, principal of Cumberland County Middle School. "Our first group of participants convened on Feb. 23."

"The long-term effects of truancy can be very serious," said Chief District Judge Steve Hurt who serves Cumberland and Monroe counties. "If we can curb student absenteeism in its early stages, we may be able to help students head off many of the negative consequences that result from persistent absences." Judge Hurt, who will help oversee the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program in Cumberland County, is also vice chief regional district judge for the Cumberland Region.

Students who have missed the number of days allotted for a school period or who have too many unexcused absences are subject to being charged with a truancy offense, which could create a formal court record. Truancy is a status offense, which means it is an act that would not be criminal if committed by an adult. The program uses a team approach to help students develop good attendance habits and improve their overall educational experience. The team is made up of judges, court designated workers, school counselors, principals, directors of pupil personnel and family resource staff.

The Court Designated Worker Program, under the direction of the Department of Juvenile Services of the Administrative Office of the Courts, will facilitate the Truancy Diversion Pilot Program. Court designated workers will hold weekly meetings with the parents and the student to review attendance records, behavior and grades, and develop a plan for success. Local judges will periodically attend meetings to reinforce the work of the truancy diversion team and offer encouragement and recognition to participating students who are making progress.

The Kentucky General Assembly created the Court Designated Worker Program in 1986 through legislation which provided the services of a court designated worker for each of the 120 counties. Court designated workers process complaints against individuals under the age of 18, and provide redress for offenses without court action and without the creation of a formal court record. The CDW program is overseen by the Administrative Office of the Courts, which is the operational arm of the Kentucky Court of Justice and supports the activities of more than 3,400 court system employees, including the elected offices of justices, judges and circuit court clerks.

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